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Chaucer's Franklin

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CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN

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It would be next to impossible to forget the encouragement and confidence that my devoted wife has placed in me during this time and she rightfully deserves the greatest acknowledgement of all.

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PREFACE

The origin and social position of Chaucer's Franklin has long been a subject of controversy. Scholars have been in disagreement as to how the Franklin fits into the society of his times. Chaucerian students have examined sources looking for information about him in his day, but most of them have accepted the findings of others and have not deliberately taken the trouble to examine primary sources to substantiate their present views and to find additional material which would contribute to findings already made.

Only a few men have dared to venture into historical fact to examine documents, records and contemporary works, in addition to Chaucer's own works, to find answers adequate enough to change the entire picture of the Franklin's position.

I have examined both primary and secondary materials and have amassed much evidence to establish a point that has been variously accepted for over a hundred years.

As I have explained on page five of this thesis, gentry is the class ranking next below the nobility. Among the gentry, a squire is immediately below a knight in rank and a franklin, also of the gentry class, follows further down the line. On page twenty one of this thesis, I have quoted from John Russell's Book of Nurture, which is a book of etiquette, that a squire's table may honor sergeants of law, late mayors of London, masters of chancery, preachers, residencers and persons that are agreeable, apprentices of law, merchants and franklins.

I had a great deal of difficulty finding the right material for this thesis. Material on the subject of the Franklin seemed to be very limited in Forsyth Library, but I was able to find source materials from books obtained by the inter-library loan which were listed in books containing secondary source material.

Mr. Marc Campbell has been exceptionally helpful in obtaining books for me through the inter-library loan and the Forsyth Library staff have been helpful in assisting me with checking materials out and in. In addition to this, Mr. Gene Mullen has been especially helpful and cordial and has given the finest of service.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE FRANKLIN

Men of all sorts, descriptions and positions were noticed by Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century. He shows great understanding by describing many types of characters and varieties of people as they are portrayed carrying on various activities in the Canterbury Tales. They pursued their livelihoods and subsisted upon their earnings, however great or meager they might have been. One of these remarkable characters was the Franklin.

Needless to say, the times were difficult in an English economy that was barely beginning to rise out of the feudal state. England was much slower than other countries to emerge from the old economic system of Europe into a new one that allowed for a freer type of government. The Hanseatic League in Germany had been trading throughout the North Atlantic and Baltic states for more than two-hundred years. The league had even established itself in England near London on the Thames and possessed a great iron yard with shipping.[1] The merchant class arose from among continental European nations and trade upon the seas became the excitement that sparked the rise in economy throughout Europe. Exchange travel by sea became prominent and men of all nations launched to foreign shores imbibing new customs, cultures and languages. Literary records show that men took note of learning, writings and literatures of many nations.

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[1] James Westfall Thompson, Economic And Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages (1300-1530) (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 146.f.

It was during this time that Geoffrey Chaucer lived and broadened his knowledge. His grandfather, Robert Chaucer, had been collector of customs on wines from Acquitaine, having been a wine merchant with a sizeable fortune and some standing in the King's Court. Geoffrey's father, John Chaucer, had attended Edward III in Flanders in 1338, and in 1348 he was appointed to collect the custom on cloths in certain ports and also became deputy to the King's Butler in Southampton. Certainly, the family had made a humble beginning in public service to the king which Geoffrey Chaucer unhesitatingly continued.[2]

Chaucer's superior knowledge can no doubt be attributed to many facts. Not only had he been able to travel through England on pilgrimages such as that of the Canterbury Pilgrims in which he became acquainted with English people of many followings, but also during his period of government service, which began before 1366, he travelled back and forth to Europe as the King's envoy. This he did for nearly ten years during which time he became well-acquainted with foreign languages and traditions. He had also come in contact with what was probably the largest private library available at that time for in his description of the Clerk in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales he accounts for:

> Twenty bookes clad in blak or reed,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophie.[3]

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[2] F. N. Robinson (ed.), The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), pp. xxiii, xxiv.

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

No doubt Chaucer had acquired knowledge out of every available source and it must be said that his own peculiar interest and native ability were modulated into his works, which are most important and representative of his time. These have exceeded the works of his contemporaries, some of which were: John Gower, William Langland, Ralph Strode and other of his native countrymen, not to mention John Barbour of Scotland, Leroy de la March of France, and others.

Through Chaucer's many contributions to English literature and poetry, many characters stand out. From the Canterbury Tales, which was probably among the last of his great works, we may choose a character whose identity and real position has long been poorly understood. Part of this misunderstanding is due to scholarly oversight and part to scholars' acceptance of the merit and work of another scholar who have taken his supposition as final authority, rather than tracing the meaning of the word to original sources. The fault is also due in part to an authority who was misled en route to an original source.[4] Hence, we find that the position of Chaucer's Franklin has in this century been a matter of dispute. It is my intention, in this thesis, to attempt to establish the true position of the Franklin; to show that in the fourteenth century he is proved by title and position to be a wealthy landowner of the gentry class.[5]

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[4] I have in reference the definition for franklin in the New English Dictionary, H. J. Todd's oversight in defining the word and Professor R. K. Root's acceptance of the definition as given by these references. I have dealt with all of these in a later paragraph.

[5] Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), p. 173.

We need to see the true picture of the fourteenth century Franklin. Scholars since the turn of the century, somehow or other, have not been able to identify the beginning, the classification, or the position of the Franklin. Apparently the word was referred to and used more in certain localities rather than throughout the whole English kingdom, but there is good evidence that kings and magistrates were familiar with the name because it is recorded many times upon government documents.[6] It is also recorded in other places of importance which I shall point out in affirming that the Franklins were a class of people in high social position in English history, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

It cannot be said that Franklins were a class of people that rose in any particular period of time and it is not exactly known how they obtained their position and wealth,[7] but it is known that they were existent as early as 1200 A. D. A record of this is found in the Rotuli Charterum 43/1 in which is said,

> Unam carrucatam terrae apud
> Hamerwich cum villanis et francheiano,

and in line 82/1,

> Omnia feuda militum et franccolanorum
> Qui tenent de eodem monasterio.[8]

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[6] John Matthews Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1926), pp. 165, 66.

[7] Gordon Hall Gerould, Chaucerian Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 34.

[8] Henry Bradley, A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles Vol. IV. F and G. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 513.

There is early knowledge, then, of the Franklins. It is certain that the name denotes a title of a class of people who are freeholders of the landowning class.[9] This much is definite, but in its second definition it goes on to say that the Franklin was also one ranking next below the gentry.[10]

When defining gentry, the Oxford Universal English Dictionary on Historical Principles asserts the meaning to be:

> 1. Rank by birth (usu. high birth). b. The quality or rank of a gentleman (arch) 1447. c. Good breeding. 2. People of gentle birth and breeding; the class to which they belong; now specific the class immediately below the nobility 1585.[11]

Wordsworth says of it, "Grave gentry of estate and name."[12] It can be seen through this definition that the gentry were just below the nobility in rank and that they were people of high distinction on the English social scale.

Apparently these definitions have merit and are backed with factual evidence of some sort, but because I am in disagreement with the latter definition of Franklin, that of, "ranking next below the gentry," I shall aspire to prove the statement to be false and further prove that the Franklin was of the gentry class.

In the first analysis, the Oxford English Dictionary was originally published as A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles. The

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[9] Onions, C. T. (ed.), Oxford Universal English Dictionary on Historical Principles Vol. IV. (Oxford: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1937), p. 747.

[10] ibid.

[11] Bradley, op. cit., p. 786.

[12] ibid.

idea originated in a resolution of the Philogical Society, and was passed on in 1857, at the suggestion of Archbishop Trench when he was Dean of Westminster. However, for several years the work was not undertaken. In 1879, the council for the Philological Society, due to the production of excellent specimens by the editor, James A. H. Murray, began the preparation of the dictionary.

The aim of the dictionary was to furnish an adequate account of the meaning, origin and history of English words now in general use, or known to have been in use at any time during the last seven-hundred years. This would include the words used even before 1200 A. D.

> It endeavors (1) to show, with regard to each individual word, when, how, in what shape, and with what signification, it became English; what development of form and meaning it has since received; which of its uses have, in the course of time, become obsolete, and which still survive; what new uses have since arisen, by what processes, and when: (2) to illustrate these facts by a series of quotations ranging from the first known occurance of the word to the latest, or down to the present day; the word being thus made to exhibit its own history and meaning: and (3) to treat the etymology of each word strictly on the basis of historical fact, and in accordance with the materials and results of modern Philological Science.[13]

The aim and purpose of the dictionary has now been established and we can understand the methods and intentions of recovering the meaning of words used in the last seven-hundred years. We can feel fairly certain that derivations are correct. However, it is my conviction that sufficient evidence was not given by the New English Dictionary to factually establish the Franklin as "ranking next below the gentry."

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[13] Ibid.

I will present primary evidence to show that the Franklin belongs to the gentry class.

It must be remembered that the Oxford scholars did not begin to record these words and their meaning until the year 1879. Furthermore it must be pointed out that there was an event which took place long before the actual compilation of the dictionary that may have a definite bearing upon the dictionary's wrong definition of the Franklin.

In 1810, H. J. Todd quoted an elaborate note from Waterhous's Commentary on Sir John Fortescue's De Laudibus Legum Angliae, which only "tended" to show that franklins did not belong to the gentry.[14] Todd undoubtedly performed an injustice by not being able to reconcile this with the fact that Chaucer's Franklin was "at sessions,"[15] since by a statute of Edward III,[16] which he cited, justices were seigneurs, and that he was "oîte tyme knight of the shire,"[17] and since by another statute[18] members of parliament were "chevaliers et serjantz des mantz vaues du paies." From this evidence it is clearly seen that Todd was left in doubt as to the gentility of the Franklin. After a re-examination of Fortescue's remarks we realize that it is not he but his commentator who is responsible for lowering the status of Chaucer's sanguine country gentleman. If Todd would have studied the material

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[14] Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin." Publications of the Modern Language Association of America Vol. 41. (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1926), p. 262.

[15] Robinson, loc. cit.

[16] Gerould, loc. cit., 34 Edw. Cap. 1.

[17] Robinson, loc. cit.

[18] Gerould, loc. cit., 46 Edw. III.

more thoroughly, he would not have left his readers in doubt. This is a grave error that has led many Chaucerian scholars to conclude that franklins were of less importance than they really were.[19]

We cannot be sure that the late Henry Bradley consulted Todd before passing the definition of "franklin" in the New English Dictionary, but he may have been influenced by it. Certainly the example quotation, "ranking next below the gentry," is a disputable clause for the reason that nobody has ever ranked franklins among the nobility and therefore the clause is open to serious challenge.[20]

Gerould points out in his research that Professor R. K. Root accepted Bradley's definition without question and based it upon an interpretation of Chaucer's Franklin that was novel and ingenious rather than sound, which view apparently would mislead scholars seeking for truths concerning Franklins. Professor Root wrote:

> The Franklin has much in common with the better type of the "self-made man." He has at his disposal all that money can buy, and he has held office in his own country; but he is uncomfortably conscious of a certain lack of "gentility," -- betrayed by his fondness for the words "gentil" and "gentilesse," -- and of the full education which would adorn his prosperous estate. . . . Conscious that, with all that he has acquired and attained, he can never be quite the complete gentleman, he would fain be the father of a gentleman; but his hopes are disappointed by the unfortunate vulgar proclivities of his son and heir.[21]

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[19] ibid.

[20] ibid.

[21] ibid., p. 263; R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, 1906 (Rev. ed. 1922), pp. 271-2.

Perhaps if Professor Root had not known the clause for which Bradley stands responsible, "ranking next below the gentry," he would not have questioned the probability that Chaucer's Franklin was of the "gentil" class.

Although Professor Root's book was admirable, it tended to lead others astray, such as Todd and Bradley have done and apparently Kittredge, in another book on Chaucer's Poetry, accepts his view when he says, "The Franklin is a wealthy man, ambitious to found a family."[22] The statement is not elaborated upon or defended, which makes it a significant fact that in less than a decade, as it seems, a weak supported explanation had acquired fictitious value.

Gerould points out that Warton was right when he said that the Franklin was "a country gentleman," and further said that his "estate consisted in free land."[23] What is further known about the franklins is that they had a high position in society and therefore must be studied from the point where we find them.

The word franklin has been used in literature, as has been previously mentioned, from 1200 A. D. in the Rotuli Chartarum,[24] to at least 1843 A. D. where it is used in Lytton's Last Bar. IV. V, and it says,

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[22]George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 204.

[23]Gerould, op. cit., pp. 263, 4.

[24]Bradley, loc. cit.

His dress was that of a substantial franklin.[25]

In addition to these, there are many other writings between the dates mentioned which include the name franklin. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

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[25] ibid.

II. HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO THE FRANKLIN

According to Muriel Bowden, much evidence has been amassed by Gerould to show that fourteenth century franklins were of the gentry, even though the original word for franklin meant simply "a freeman." Bowden says that Manly and Robinson are in agreement with Gerould because of the evidence he has found to substantiate the Franklin's position as being that of the gentry. I was unable to find primary evidence of it, but Manly tells us that Thomas Chaucer, Geoffrey's son, was a franklin in the fifteenth century, yet "he was one of the wealthiest and most powerful persons in England."[26]

Besides producing Gerould's evidence for the Franklin's position, I will also offer additional evidence which will help to substantiate the argument. Gerould leaves the dictionaries to find clearer evidence as to the meaning of the term "franklin."

The first observation that should be made is that in a few cases the word indicates a freeman as distinguished from a villain but does not here make any further suggestion of rank. In the year 1440 the word franklin, in the Promptuarium Parvulorum was termed"libertinus"[27] or libertine which, in its third definition, means "one free from self-restraint.[28] Nearly the same use of the word is found in the Vita

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[26] Bowden, op. cit., p. 179.

[27] Bradley, loc. cit.; Gerould, op. cit., p. 264.

[28] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1951), p. 484.

Haroldi, written in 1300, where we find that the wounded king was carried off the battlefield, "a duobus ut fertur mediocribus viris quos francalanos sive agricolas vocant agnitus."[29] With the above evidence, there is little doubt that the authors regarded franklins as low creatures. Gerould says that Matzner in his Sprachproben and the editors of the New English Dictionary were probably justified upon the basis of these two instances in giving "freeman" as one meaning of "franklin," but that they would be unjustified in passing this off as the primary definition.[30]

I have found many other illustrations about the Franklin that refer to him as a member of the landholding class, and, when examined closely, to a class of very good social position. The context, at least, makes this so sufficiently clear in most instances that we can no longer doubt the fitness of calling the Franklin a gentleman. Gerould says that even in the thirteenth century the franklin was the equivalent of a country squire in modern England.[31]

Three of the earliest referances to the word have been found in charters. The first of these is from the year 1166, during the reign of Henry II. In a grant to Cornal Abbey we find the words:

> Super dominium ecclesiae sunt feoda trium militum et dimidii cum tenura Francolensium in villa Cernae. Quisque autem

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[29] Bradley, loc. cit.; Gerould, loc. cit.; Ed. W. de G. Birch, 1885, p. 34.

[30] Gerould, op. cit., pp. 264, 5.

[31] ibid.

> istorum debet facere wardam ad praeceptum vestrum apud Castellum de Corfe uno mense per annum.[32]

It is not known how many franklins there were for their number is not mentioned, but they certainly must have been men of importance because it was their duty to guard Corfe Castle. Gerould says of them:

> Their wealth would depend upon their number, the aggregate of their holdings being to the amount of three and a half knights' fees, unless -- as is possible -- they had holdings from other overlords than the abbey.[33]

At any rate, these franklins must have been individuals who had possessions out of the ordinary and who were considered to be free men.

Two other references from pre-Chaucerian times are from Charter Rolls given to conventional establishments during the reign of John, already referred to in Chapter I of this thesis.[34] Gerould says of the first quotation, that the Franklin of this period could not have been a very wealthy person since his estate was only between 160 and 180 acres, but at the same time he could hire villains as laborers and could have done quite well. But in the second quotation, an interesting discovery is made when it is perceived that knights and franklins are mentioned in the same phrase as holding from the monastery, and apparently on the same terms. The only slight difference between them is one of titular rank, rather than of tenure. From this evidence it is seen that they occupy really the same positions.[35]

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[32] Gerould, op. cit., p. 265; Red Book of the Exchequer, ed. H. Hull, 1896 (Rolls Ser. 99), 1, 212. Quoted in De Cange from the Liber niger Scascarii, concerning which see Hall's introduction.

[33] Gerould, loc. cit.

[34] See page four for quotations.

[35] Gerould, op. cit., p. 266.

During the thirteenth century, it is interesting to note that Le Fraunkeleyn was used as a surname, and for persons who had inheritances and holdings of land which shows that any people in this category had a very solid and brilliant social position.[36] Gerould states that this is some of the best evidence he has for establishing an assured position of the class.

At this point we will cite some references by versifiers who wrote at the end of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth. The first one that we will consider is the shadowy Robert of Gloucester, who in his account of King Lear warned parents against giving up their land to their children. Robert says:

> Vor wel may a simple frankelein . in wiseise him so bringe.
> Of lute lond wanne ber biuel . such ces of an kinge.[37]

He is called "simple franklin," but in contrast to a king, it is as if one should set off a member of the squirearchy against the king.

Another writing, the Cursor Mundi, gives us an example in another way. The author tells about the conversation of Jacob with Pharaoh, who says of the magnificent Joseph:

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[36] Ibid.; See, for example, the Calendar of Patent Rolls and Calendar of Close Rolls, as well as the Excerpta e Rotulis Finium in Turri Londinensi, ed. C. Roberts, 1836, which cover the years 1216-1272. The use of settled surnames for people above the lower classes is a phenomenon of earlier date than is sometimes supposed.

[37] Gerould, loc. cit.; Metrical Chronicle, ed. W. A. Wright, 1887 (Rolls Ser. 86), 1, 61, lines 821-822. Dated 1290-1300.; Bradley, loc. cit.

> First he was here als our thain
> But now es he for al franckelain.[38]

While considering the honors held by Joseph at this time, it would seem that Pharaoh was meant to imply more by his antithesis than the mere contrast of freedom with serfdom. Gerould warns not to press this point too hard since here it is certain that the author needed a rhyme, but it must be remembered that the couplet could never have been written if early in the fourteenth century franklins were considered to belong to the lower orders.[39]

Nicholas Trivet evidently recognizes no wide gulf between a knight and a franklin either for he makes no test of it when in his Anglo-Norman Chroniques he writes that:

> Thomas Brotherton (filius R. Edouardi I) apres le mort son pere esposa la fille de un Fraunclein appelle Alice.[40]

It does not matter if historians affirm that the Earl of Norfolk's father-in-law was Sir Thomas Hales of Harwich, or that Trivet's statement is openly absurd in one particular, because Thomas of Brotherton was not born until 1300, and his father died in 1307. The point is that a contemporary chronicler could confuse a knight with a franklin after this manner and apparently no vast difference was recognized

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[38] Bradley, loc. cit.; Gerould, loc. cit.; Cursor Mundi, dated 1300-1325, ed. R. Morris, 1874-1893 (EETS), lines 5373-5374.

[39] Gerould, op. cit., p. 266,7.

[40] Ibid., p. 267.

between the two.[41]

Robert Mannyng uses the word twice and even couples franklins with squires. This was an exact equation in the fifteenth century. Conan sends to Dianot for his daughter Ursula,

> And gentil damysels vngyuen,
> Bat able to mennes companye were bryuen, --
> Squyers doghtres, & frankelayns,
> To gyue hem to knyghtes & to swayns.[42]

The only difficulty here is to find the meaning that Mr. Mannyng can have attached to "swayns," but his second example is more revealing than the first. In regard to the Statute of Mortmain, in the second part of his Chronicle, he penned:

> Was mad an ober statut, bat non erle no baroun,
> No ober lord stoute, ne fraunkeleyn of toun,
> Tille holy kirke salle gyue tenenement, rent no lond.[43]

The corresponding lines in Pierre de Langtoft's Chronicle, which was Robert's source, run as follows:

> Est fet l'estatut, ke counte, ne baroun,
> Ne seygnur de terre, parmi la regioun,
> Face a seinte Eglise offrand ne doun
> De terre ne tenement, si par cunge noun
> Du rays e de son consayl.[44]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.; The Story of England, ed. F. J. Furnwall, 1887 (Rolls Ser. 87), I, 230, lines 6545-6548. Dated 1338.

[43] Gerould, loc. cit.; Ed. as by Pierre de Langtoft by T. Hearne, 1725, p. 239. This part of Robert's work is not in Furnivall's edition. It was based on Pierre de Langtoft, which explains Hearne's error of ascription.; Bradley, loc. cit.

[44] Gerould, loc. cit.; Ed. T. Wright. 1866-1868 (Rolls Ser. 47), II, 174.

Robert, no doubt, felt that "lorde stoute" was not a sufficient translation for "seygnur de terre" and so added "fraunkeleyn of toun."[45]

Certainly to show their high social position, J. Russell in his Book of Nurture, in line 1071, shows that:

> Marchaundes & Franklons worshipfulle & honorable
> may be set semely at a squyers table.[46]

It must be said that squires, unquestionably, were country gentlemen and next to knights in rank. They were the landed proprietors and were often the principle landowners in a village or district.[47] It is no wonder that "Merchants and Franklins" were honored at the Squire's table, for they belonged to the gentry class too.

From the Roy Rede Me (arb.) of 1528, line 100 says:

> One or two ryche francklyngis
> Occupyinge a dozen mens lyvyngis.[48]

This writing shows that franklins were wealthy and held large estates which also produces evidence that they had possessions like others of the gentry class.

From 1590, Spenser's Fairy Queen says in line I. X. 6:

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[45]Gerould, loc. cit.; This phrase is illustrated by a writ analyzed in Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, ed. H. C. Maxwell Lyte, 1916, II, 56, No. 233. In this writ, dated 1 Sept. 9 Edward II (1315), Thomas de Polington is described as "lord of the whole town of Polington." "Town" was doubtless used in the sense familiar to all New Englanders.

[46]Bradley, loc. cit.

[47]Bradley, op. cit., p. 786.

[48]Bradley, op. cit., p. 583.

> Entred in, a spatious court they see..
> Where them does meete a francklin faire and free.[49]

Spenser here recognizes two qualities in the franklin to whom he refers, that of his striking appearance, he was evidently well dressed, which showed somewhat of his wealth, and he was a freeman. These are two good qualities of men belonging to the gentry class.

In Rushaws Historical Collection of 1659, it says in line I, 17:

> Francklines, and rich Farmers, Esquires, to precede them, would yield your majesty also a great sum of money in present.[50]

The writer recognized the great wealth of these men and suggested to the king not to overlook the possibilities found within their means.

It is in Moufet and Bennett's Health Improv. (1655), published in 1746, that line 340 mentions:

> The Franklin's Bread of England is counted most nourishing.[51]

The Franklin was not only free but through the years had actually improved upon his bread, making it most nourishing.

Another reference to franklins is made in 1659 by Howell in his Lexicon where he says, "Proverbs may be called the truest Franklins or Freeholders of a countrey."[52] This may be his way of saying that Franklins were some of the most intelligent people who lived in England. It is certain that they were independent and in my opinion their freedom caused them to be some of England's finest citizens and were able to make great contributions to the English economy.

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[49] ibid.

[50] ibid.

[51] ibid.

[52] ibid.

By 1577, Holingshed in his Chronicles hints at the lavishness of the Franklin's table when he says in line 31/1:

To purchase the name of a sumptuous frankelen or a good viander.[53]

Not only is there a hint at sumptuousness, but there is also a suggestion that people in the right position working upward on the English Social Scale could purchase or obtain a name of high rank.

In Somerville's Officious Messenger of 1727, he says of our subject in line 72:

No Franklin carving of a chine
at Christide, ever looked so fine.[54]

Again, this is another couplet that denotes the luxuries of the Franklin, of his table, his household and his dress.

The word franklin is used three times in William Langland's Piers Plowman, a writing contemporary to Chaucer's works. In the first example, the Dreamer, in the guise of an idle London priest, is conversing with Reason. In an obvious ironic strain he talks about the privileges and advantage of the clergy, the first among them being idlen ss. He goes on to say:

For shold no clerk be crouned . bote yf he ycome were
Of franklens and free men . and of folke yweddede.
Bondmen and bastardes . and beggers children,
Thuse by-longeth to labour . and lordes kyn to seruen
Bothe god and good men . as here degree asketh.[55]

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[53] ibid.

[54] ibid.

[55] William Langland, Piers Plowman and Richard the Redeless (Oxford: The University Press, 1954), p. 120.

There is a definite contrast here between bond and free, but the entire implication is that franklins are gentlefolk. In the second instance of Piers Plowman, although no satisfactory conclusions can be drawn according to Gerould, yet it should be noted that wit is discoursing about the contrariety of "Westminster Law," because it visits the sins of the fathers upon the children. If a householder perished on the gallows, though he were a franklin, his son lost the inheritance.[56] The passus says:

> For thauh the fader be a frankelayne . and for a felon be hanged,
> The heritage that the air should haue . ys at the kynges wille.[57]

The third case is even more conclusive as to the writer's estimate of the social position of franklins. Conscience is the speakers. He says that Jesus was knight, king, and conqueror because he had the virtue to make a conquest for the right. Langland says:

> To make lordes of laddes . of londe that he wynneth
> And fre men foule thralles . that folweth nouzt his lawes.
> The Iuwes, that were gentil-men . Iesu thei dispised,
> Bothe his lore and his lawe . now ar thei lowe cherlis.
> As wyde as the worlde is . wonyeth there none
> But vnder tribut and taillage . as tykes and cherles.
> And tho that become Crysten . by conseille of the baptiste,
> Aren frankeleynes, fre men . thorw fullyng that thei toke,
> And gentel-men with Iesu . for Iesus was yfulled,
> And vpon Caluarye on crosse . ycrouned kynge of Iewes.[58]

According to the B redactor of Piers Plowman, which was not disputed by the C redactor, franklins were not only freemen, but gentlemen as well.

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[56] D. Chadwick, Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), p. 45.

[57] Langland, op. cit., C, Pass. xi, 240-241, p. 279.

[58] ibid.; B. Pass. xix, 32-41. In C, Pass xxii, 32-41, pp. 552, 3.

This one passage alone would be sufficient evidence to refute the idea that they ranked "next below the gentry." The fine but very significant phrase "gentlemen with Iesu" is used to illustrate the meaning of "freeman" and there by the fallibility of systems to recover the original meaning of words is seen as it was used and placed in the New English Dictionary.[59]

Mr. Gerould points out that detailed and precise evidence of another kind has been found from the first half of the fifteenth century concerning the position of franklins. Oddly enough, it comes from a source, which according to him, "could not be bettered -- a book of etiquette." John Russell, who wrote the Book of Nurture, was compelled to put his mind on questions of precedence. He shows mens estates who were "equal with a knight," as sitting three or four to a mess at mealtime. He lists them as follows:

> Abbot and prior "sons mitre," dean, arch-deacon, Master of Rolls, under justices, barons of the king's Exchequer, provincial of a religious order, doctor of divinity, doctor of "both laws," protho notary, pope's collector, and mayor of the staple. At a squire's table, sitting four to a mess, come sergeants of law, late mayors of London, masters of chancery, all "prechers, residencers, and persons that ar greable," apprentices of law, merchants, and franklins.[60]

Gerould admits that this list may seem "slightly whimsical" but continues

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[59]Gerould, op. cit., p. 269.

[60]Ibid., pp. 269, 70.; The Babees Book, ed. F. J. Furnwall, 1868 (EETS 32), pp. 188, 89.

to give good argument in favor of Franklin's gentility saying that their position could have been defended by Joh Russell. Gerould further points out that merchants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had a higher social estate than they did in later times, but at this time they ranked with the gentry.[61]

I mentioned Sir John Fortescue's famous work De Laudibus Legum Anglial earlier and I would now like to take a quotation from it. When he composed this work between 1468 and 1471, he wrote:

> Regio eciam illa ita respersa refertaque est possessoribus terrarum et agrorum, quod in ea villula tam parva reperiri non poterit in qua non est miles, armiger, vel paterfamilias qualis ibidem frankeleyn vulgariter noncupatur. magnis ditatus possessionibus; necnon libere tenentes alii, et valetti plurimi suis patrimoniis sufficientes ad faciendum juratum in forma prenotata.[62]

This was translated in 1775 and reprinted in Amos' edition as follows:

> England is so thick spread and filled with rich and landed men, that there is scarce a small village in which you may not find a knight, and esquire, or some substantial householder, commonly called, a Frankleyne; all men of considerable estates: there are others who are called Freeholders, and many yeoman of estates sufficient to make a substantial Jury, within the description before observed.[63]

When Fortescue comments on the wealth of some of the "valetti," he clearly classifies franklins with knights and esquires rather than with the "libere tenentes alii."[64] Gerould concludes that Fortescue's

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[61] Gerould, op. cit., p. 270.

[62] ibid.; Cap. Ed. S. B. Chrimes, 1942, p. 68.

[63] Gerould, loc. cit.

[64] ibid.

inclinations are in agreement with those of John Russell, and from this point of view it may be determined that franklins were of the gentry.

III. CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN

Now, we will get a closer look at Chaucer's Franklin. Chaucer gives us certain clues as to the Franklin's position in the Canterbury Tales. He was in the company of a "Sergeant of the Lawe." He was wealthy and lived generously on his land. He was "lord and sire" at "sessions," which means that he sat importantly as justice in petty sessions. He had been a sheriff. He had often been "Knight of the shire," representing his county in parliament. He had been a "contour," probably auditing the accounts of the sheriff. He was a "vavasour" and there had been none "worthier."[65] The Franklin calls himself a "burel man" and says that he never slept on Parnassus, learned Cicero, or acquainted himself with the colors of rhetoric,[66] which according to Gerould, are half-humorous deprecations of an individual who made no pretence of clerkly lore, though he showed sufficient learning in his tale.[67] It seems to me that each point mentioned here has significant value and when understood together gives adequate confirmation of the Franklin's position as a member of the gentry class.

The Franklin was going to Canterbury to visit the St. Thomas Shrine with a group of pilgrims. He was in the company of a Sergeant of the Law whose learning and success is equally emphasized with that

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[65] Robinson, loc. cit.

[66] ibid., p. 134, 5.

[67] Gerould, op. cit., p. 264.

of the Franklin. According to John Russell, the two men were of the same social rank and had associations in public and private business which, no doubt, let to their acquaintance and friendship. Gerould reminds us that the Man of Law had often sat as justice of assizes, "by patente, and by plein commissioun,"[68] where the Franklin would have been in attendence both as an important landholder and as a "countour," not to mention the litigation in which men of any substance seem almost continuously to have been engaged during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Chaucer does not use "countour" in the exact sense that John Selden does in his Titles of Honor, when he wrote: "For a countour was, if I am not deceived, a sergeant at law, known also then by both names."[69] It is certain that the Franklin, in understanding business, also had some knowledge of the law. From this point of view we can observe that "sergeant" was apparently used to designate propertied gentlemen who were not knights as well as lawyers. Edward III made a statute in 1372 which reads that neither men of law "pursuant busoignes en la Court le Roi," nor sheriffs during their terms of office, shall be returned to parliament as knights of shires. "Mes voit le Roi, que chivalers et serjantz des meuly vaues du paies soient retornez."[70]

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[68]Gerould, op. cit., p. 271.; The meaning of these terms is well illustrated by a reference to sheriffs in Statutes of the Realm, 28 Edw. III, cap. 9 (1354): "viscontes de diverses contees, par vertue des commissions et briefs generals."

[69]Gerould, loc. cit.; Works, 1726, III, 1027. Selden quotes the Mirror of Justices ("Chez le seigneur Coke en l'epist. du 9. livre"): "Countors sont serjeants, sachans la ley del royalm."

[70]Gerould, loc. cit.; Statutes of the Realm, 46 Edw. III (1372).

There is also a similar account recorded in Pierre de Langtoft's Chronicle. A detachment of men in a military expedition to Glascony are designated:

> Barouns e vavasours de gentil lynage,
> Chuvalers et serjaunts of lur cosinage,
> Gens a pe sanz nounbre de more et boscage.[71]

Gerould points out that these sergeants may certainly be equated with franklins.[72]

Sir John Fortescue has reminded us, as was before mentioned, that Chaucer's Franklin was not exceptionally wealthy, and neither was he a poor man, but was like a great number of gentlemen who did not have titles but had great possessions. The idea that peers and knights were the only important landlords in the complex world of feudal tenure, is a serious mistake. From the Calendars of Inquisitions in behalf of the reigns of Edward III and Richard II, we are impressed by the sizeable holdings of men who were neither noblemen nor knights. Gerould reports that some of the wealthy commoners had land "scattered over several counties."[73] The Inquisitions confirm very conclusively the wealth and the importance of men below the estate of knights. Gerould reminds us

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[71]Gerould, op. cit., p. 272.; Langtoft's Chronicle, ed. T. Wright, 1866-1868 (Rolls Ser. 47). II, 230.

[72]Gerould, loc. cit.

[73]Ibid.; See the case of John Giffard: VII, nos. 78, 180; IX, no 686. This same Giffard may possibly be referred to elsewhere without specific designation.

that Chaucer's Friar took advantage of this, who must have loved good cheer, and made himself beloved and familiar,

With frankelayns over al in his contree.[74]

Chaucer, to further exemplify the Franklin's wealth, along with his hospitality, mentions that the food and drink in his house was immense.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the landed gentry were fairly prosperous and there is now no doubt of it, and, according to Thomas Fuller, the country gentleman has been well-to-do even into the nineteenth century. Fuller says:

> And here under favour I conceive, that if a strict inquiry should be made after the ancient gentry of England, most of them would be found amongst such middle-sized persons as are above two hundred, and beneath a thousand pounds of annual revenue. . . . Men of great estates, in national broils, have smarted deeply for their visible engagements, to the ruin of their families, whereof we have too many sad experiments, whilst such persons who are moderately mounted above the level of common people into a competency, above want and beneath envy, have, by God's blessing on their frugality, continued longest in their conditions, entertaining all alterations in the state with the less destructive change unto themselves.[75]

Men like these were often chosen to represent their counties in parliament. Chaucer's Franklin had been in parliament "ful ofte tyme." An examination of the lists of individuals summoned during the reigns of Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV shows that a knight of the shire was by no means always a knight in degree, even if it is true that he commonly held that rank. Men were selected from the counties by rank

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[74]Gerould, loc. cit.; Canterbury Tales, line 1,216.

[75]Gerould, op. cit., p. 273.; Worthies of England (1662), ed. P. A. Nuttall, 1840, I, 63.

and estate and certain ones were more prone than others to select untitled men, but the honor was to a great extent reserved for knights. The Franklin had been in parliament many times and this evidence shows that he was a prominent leader in his shire. He could not have been elected if he had not been a gentleman because it was against the law to elect a commoner. It was also against the custom to send a lesser person to Westminster and this is affirmed in a statute of 1372, which, as I have already quoted, says, "Mes voit le Roi, que chivalers et serjantz des meuly values du paies soient retornez."[76] There is a more concise law in the fifteenth century that provides knights of shires,

> soient notablez Chivalers des mesmez Counteez pour lez queux ils serront issint eslez, ou autrement tielx notablez Esquires gentils homez del Nativite dez mesmez les Counteez comme soient ables destre tiel Chivaler que en la degree de vadlet & desouth.[77]

Chaucer's Franklin had been a sheriff, and this further means that he was a man of high position in his county. Thomas Fuller says, "the principal gentry in every shire, of most ancient extractions and best estates, were deputed for that place."[78] Bowden records that the Franklin had been a sheriff and was "an administrative officer of the crown, ranking next in the shire to the Lord Lieutenant, and a pleader in court."[79] Trevelyan says of it, "This officer (a sheriff) was

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[76] Gerould, loc. cit.; Statutes of the Realm, 46 Edw. III.

[77] ibid., 23 Hen. VI, cap. 14.

[78] Gerould, op. cit., p. 274.; Ed. G. E. Woodbine, 1922; or T. Twiss, 1878 (Rolls Ser. 70).

[79] Bowden, loc. cit.

chosen by the crown from among the gentry of the district, and was the link between Westminster and the countryside."[80] He further says,

> He (the sheriff) had once carried on almost all the king's business in the shire, and though many of his powers had since been delegated to the Justices of the Peace or to the King's Judges on circuit, he still remained the most important local officer.[81]

It is certain that men of high position and of social rank (gentlemen) could only serve in the office of a sheriff. The man also had to have the ability to go along with the rank in order to succeed in his office.[82]

Sheriffs were selected with great care as Sir John Fortescue records. He declares that on the day after all Souls a large group of specified "high officers of the crown" meet in the Exchequer,

> Ubi hii omnes communi assensu nominant de quolibet comitatu tres milites vel armigeros, quos inter ceteros ejusdem comitatus ipsi opinantur melioris esse deposicionis et fame et ad officium vicecomitis illius melius dispositos, ex quibus rex unum tantum eligit.[83]

In the final explication of Chaucer's analysis of the Franklin's social position, he says that nowhere was there "such a worthy vavasour." To explain the meaning of vavasour, Gerould quotes from three of John Selden's observations. In the first observation,

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[80] George Macaulay Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), p. 57.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Gerould, loc. cit.

[83] Ibid.

> The use and continuance of the name of a vavasour was such, that from the Normans, until the time of Henry IV, it was a name known; but feudal only, not at all honorary.[84]

The second one says:

> And the Author of Fleta (lib. i, cap 5, 34): sub regibus sunt comites & barones, duces, milites, magnates, vavasores, & alii subditi ut liberi & servi, qui omnes aetatem xii annorum ad minus habentes ferre tenentur regi fidelitatis sacramentum.[85]

The third one explains,

> Nor for the nature of a vavasour; though we perhaps may soon miss in giving an exact definition of him, yet it is plain that he was ever beneath a baron. And it seems he was in the more ancient times only a tenant by knight's service, that either held of a mesne lord, and not immediately of the king, or at least of the king as of an honor or manner, and not in chief, both of which excluded him from the dignity of a baron by tenure.[86]

Selden is just when he says of Chaucer's calling the Franklin a vavasour:

> It is likely that he gave him his title as the best, and above what he had before commended him for. Neither would he have put it as an addition of worth to a sheriff and a countour, unless it had been of special note and honor.[87]

Selden, in his conclusion, shows wisdom in assuring that "we perhaps may soon miss in giving an exact definition" of a vavasour.[88] Gerould says that modern historians have also been at a loss to define

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[84] ibid., p. 275.

[85] ibid.

[86] ibid.

[87] ibid.

[88] ibid.

the term with precision. In behalf of this problem he quotes F. W. Maitland who says, "Whatever else we may think of these vavassores, they are not barons and probably they are not immediate tenents of the king."[89] He also quotes from Pollock and Maitland's History of English Law in which this unsatisfactory statement occurs: "Neither the theory that the vavassor must needs be a vassal's vassal, nor the derivation of his name from vassi vassorum can be regarded as certain. In England the word is rare."[90] Even though the word was rare, it was still recognized and used.

Henry de Bracton, whom we have mentioned earlier in reference to sheriffs, certainly was not in doubt as to the position of vavasours in the thirteenth century, even though his description of them leaves us still desiring a fuller meaning. He says:

> Item in temporalibus imperatores, reges, et principes in his quae pertinent ad regnum, et sub eis duces, comites et carones, magnates sive vavasores, et milites, et etiam liberi et villani, et diversae potestates sub rege constitutar. . . . Sunt et alii potentes sub rege, qui barones dicuntur, hoc est robur belli. Sunt etiam alii qui dicuntur vavasores, viri magnar dignitatis. Vavasor enim nihil milius dici poterit quam vas sortitum and valetudinem. Sunt etiam sub rege militiam exercendam electi, et supradictis militent.[91]

Bracton lists vavasours after barons but before knights and implies that there is a kind of distinction as if barons and vavasours represented social grades, while knights were functionaries in war.

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[89] ibid.; Domesday Book and Beyond, 1897, p. 87.

[90] Gerould, loc. cit.

[91] Gerould, op. cit., p. 276.

A vavasour was evidently smaller than a baron but an individual of the same type. This is supported by Bracton's remarks when he is discussing rights of dower. He says:

> Sed quod dicitur de baronia non est observandum in vavassoria vel aliis minoribus feodis quam baronia, quia caput non habent sicut baronia.[92]

Knighthood was in another category. To Bracton the two positions were not equal and from the thirteenth century to the twentieth it would be impossible to establish the social value of each one. The important point here is on Bracton's evidence, that the vavasour was a land-holder of considerable importance. Bracton does not discuss the nature of his tenure, which may mean that the distinction between chief tenents and sub-tenants did not appear as important to the medieval lawyer as it does to the modern historian. Upon all occasions the vavasour was a magnate and person of dignity.[93]

Several writers other than Chaucer have also used the term. Pierre de Langtoft used the word at least three times in his Chronicle the first of which I have quoted on page twenty six. In this extraction it is clearly seen that barons and vavasours were from the "gentil lineage."[94] In the second quotation, barons and vavasours, as well as chivalers and squires are mentioned as being in the same category. In this instance,

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[92] ibid.

[93] ibid.

[94] ibid., p. 277.

a military force was again in question. King Edward sent to relieve Dunbar:

> Le counte Garenne, of tut son poer,
> Le counte de Warwyk, et Hugo le Despenser;
> Barouns et vavassours, chuvaler, esquyer,
> Surays et Norays, i alaynt de bon quer.[95]

The third quotation is self-explanatory:

> A cele nesaveme estalent tuez
> Vavassours curtoys de gentil parentez.[96]

It is certain that de Langtoft held vavasours to be gentlemen. We must remember also that he died in 1307[97] and so expressed his views just previous to Chaucer's time, which would be from about 1340 to 1400.

A few decades later, Robert Mannyng of Brunne used the word in describing King Arthur's allocation of lands after his conquests on the European Continent. He said:

> He gaf also sire Beduer,
> Bot of fe his boteler,
> He gaf hym in fe all Normandie,
> Bitt benne hit was cald Neustrie,
> Boloyne he gaf to sire Holdyn,
> And Nayne to Borel his cosyn;
> He gaf giftes of honurs,
> & landes & rentes, to vauasours.[98]

This passage evidently has little to contribute, but it does not contradict Langtoft's usage of the word.

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[95] ibid.

[96] ibid.

[97] ibid.

[98] ibid.; The Story of England, ed. Furnivall, p. 384.

Gerould quotes a line from the English Sir Ferumbras, written in Chaucer's century, and seems upon first examination to be contradictory. It reads:

Litel prowesse for me it were wiv a vauasour for to melle.[99]

This implies, at first glance, to mean a person of low estate but Ferumbras is talking foolishly, only momentarily, to the great Oliver. Gerould points out that Oliver is a braggert and he would have it understood that dukes and earls are the only proper antagonists for so great a warrior. Apparently there is nothing here to upset the belief that a vavasour was a person of high social rank.[100]

Camden, in the introduction to his Britain of 1617, gives an account of England's social orders. He says:

> Vavasores, sive Valvasores, proximum post Barones locum olim tenuerunt, quos a Valvis Iuridici deducunt. Franci, sum in Italia rerum potirentur, Valvasores illos dixerunt, qui a Duce, Marchione, Comite, aut Capitaneo plebem, plebisve partem acceperant. Rara haec fuit apud nos dignitas, & siqua fuit, jam paulatim desiit. Nobiles minores sunt Equites aurati, Armigeri, qui vulgo Generosi, et Gentlemen dicuntur.[101]

Certainly from this evidence there can be no doubt that "vavasour" in medieval English usage is in harmony with "franklin" and there is no distinguishment. Chaucer's Franklin was a vavasour and it is to be believed that all franklins were vavasours. The words appear to be

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[99] Gerould, op. cit., p. 278.

[100] ibid.

[101] ibid.

interchangeable and indicate a general social condition rather than titles. They are rare to appear in documents and Geroud feels the reason is that they were not very explicit and he goes on to say that anyone who could be called by these names held a very honorable status in the kingdom.[102] Geroud concludes by saying that "Chaucer's Franklin was a member of that class of landed gentry which was already old in the fourteenth century and which has never felt the lack of any higher title than gentleman, though from it have come, first and last, most of the men who have made England great."[103]

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

From all of the evidence herein presented, we can conclude beyond any doubt that the Franklin, to whom Chaucer referred, was of the gentry class, possessed great wealth, and held an important position in society.

I have tried to show that it is easy for scholars to make mistakes if they rely too heavily upon dictionaries and other secondary source materials in their research. The possibility of finding new and different evidence from primary sources should never be overlooked. I have tried to present as much evidence as possible about the origin of the Franklin and have illustrated his position with a number of accounts to give sufficient evidence that he was a wealthy landowner of the gentry class.

There have been many historical references that have helped to establish the Franklin's identity and I am especially indebted to Gerould's findings for they have helped immeasurably to settle the argument as to whether the Franklin was of the gentry class.

Chaucer has not only shown his vast knowledge of the Franklin, but he has also given us one of the clearest pictures of a gentleman and his relationship to society in the fourteenth century. In the light of this investigation, it would be hard to find a better example of a true gentleman in all of literature.

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APPENDIX

Footnotes.

8 One Carrucates near Hamerwich with serfs and franklins,

All fiefs (feudal holdings) of soldiers and franklins who hold them from the same monastery.

32 Above the domain of the church are the fiefs of three soldiers and half-holdings with tenure of franklins in the hamlet of Cerna. However, each of those must stand guard at your order around Corft Castle one month per year.

40 Thomas Brotherton (Son of K. Edward I) after the death of his father married the daughter of a Franklin named Alice.

42 And gentle damsels ungiven being able for men's company were brought squires daughters and Franklins to give them to knights and to swains.

43 An over statute (ruling) was passed that no earl or baron,
No overlord strong, nor franklin of town,
Shall rent any land, tille holy church shall give holding (approve the transaction).

44 The statute was made that no count, nor baron, nor holder of land, about that region should rent any offering or gift of land to holy church except by the sealed name of the King and his Council.

70 But let the King see, that knights and sergeants of middle class of the country be returned.

71 Barons & vavasours of gentil lineage,
Chevaliers (knights) and sergeants of their relation,
Peoples of the land without number from moor & thicket.

77 Let there be notable Knights from the same Counties for which they will be citizens, or else such noble squires, gentlemen by birth from the same Counties as may be able by power of right to be a Knight in the position of valet and servant.

83 When all these by common consent named from whatever county three soldiers or ambassadors, whom among the others of that same county they considered to be superior in fact and report, and better suited to the office of that viscount, from whom the king chooses only one.

85 Under Kings are counts and barons, dukes, soldiers, magnates, vassals, and other subordinates as freemen and serfs, who all having attained the age of twelve years at least are held to bear oath of fidelity to the King.

91 Likewise at times emperors, kings and princes in these areas which belong to the kingdom, and under these dukes, counts, and barons, magnates or vassals, and soldiers, and also freedmen and serfs, and various magistrates established under the king.... There are also other magistrates under the king who are called barons -- this is the strength of war. There are even others who are called vassals men of great dignity. For a vassal will be able to be said no better than a chosen vessel. There are also under the king soldiers, of course chosen to train the militia, and they carry on war, as said above.

92 But what is said about the barony is not to be observed in vassalage or in other lesser feudal holdings than the barony.

95 Count Garenne of all his peers,
Count of Warwich, and Hugh the Dispenser;
Barons & vassals, knight, squire
Southerners & Northerners, went there willingly.

96 At this encounter were killed courteous vassals of gentle parentage.

101 Vassals or Valvasores formerly held the position next after Barons, whom they led down from the Doors of the Judgement Hall. The Franks, when they took possession of affairs in Italy, called those men Vassals who had received from a duke, marquis, a Count, or a Captain a town or part of a town. This was a rare honor among us, and if any such existed, it has now vanished little by little. Lesser nobility are the Golden Knights (having gilded shields), Armorbearers, who are called gentlemen or in the common speech, Generosi.

CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN

being

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by

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It would be next to impossible to forget the encouragement and confidence that my devoted wife has placed in me during this time and she rightfully deserves the greatest acknowledgement of all.

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PREFACE

The origin and social position of Chaucer's Franklin has long been a subject of controversy. Scholars have been in disagreement as to how the Franklin fits into the society of his times. Chaucerian students have examined sources looking for information about him in his day, but most of them have accepted the findings of others and have not deliberately taken the trouble to examine primary sources to substantiate their present views and to find additional material which would contribute to findings already made.

Only a few men have dared to venture into historical fact to examine documents, records and contemporary works, in addition to Chaucer's own works, to find answers adequate enough to change the entire picture of the Franklin's position.

I have examined both primary and secondary materials and have amassed much evidence to establish a point that has been variously accepted for over a hundred years.

As I have explained on page five of this thesis, gentry is the class ranking next below the nobility. Among the gentry, a squire is immediately below a knight in rank and a franklin, also of the gentry class, follows further down the line. On page twenty one of this thesis, I have quoted from John Russell's Book of Nurture, which is a book of etiquette, that a squire's table may honor sergeants of law, late mayors of London, masters of chancery, preachers, residencers and persons that are agreeable, apprentices of law, merchants and franklins.

I had a great deal of difficulty finding the right material for this thesis. Material on the subject of the Franklin seemed to be very limited in Forsyth Library, but I was able to find source materials from books obtained by the inter-library loan which were listed in books containing secondary source material.

Mr. Marc Campbell has been exceptionally helpful in obtaining books for me through the inter-library loan and the Forsyth Library staff have been helpful in assisting me with checking materials out and in. In addition to this, Mr. Gene Mullen has been especially helpful and cordial and has given the finest of service.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE FRANKLIN

Men of all sorts, descriptions and positions were noticed by Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century. He shows great understanding by describing many types of characters and varieties of people as they are portrayed carrying on various activities in the Canterbury Tales. They pursued their livelihoods and subsisted upon their earnings, however great or meager they might have been. One of these remarkable characters was the Franklin.

Needless to say, the times were difficult in an English economy that was barely beginning to rise out of the feudal state. England was much slower than other countries to emerge from the old economic system of Europe into a new one that allowed for a freer type of government. The Hanseatic League in Germany had been trading throughout the North Atlantic and Baltic states for more than two-hundred years. The league had even established itself in England near London on the Thames and possessed a great iron yard with shipping.[1] The merchant class arose from among continental European nations and trade upon the seas became the excitement that sparked the rise in economy throughout Europe. Exchange travel by sea became prominent and men of all nations launched to foreign shores imbibing new customs, cultures and languages. Literary records show that men took note of learning, writings and literatures of many nations.

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[1]James Westfall Thompson, Economic And Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages (1300-1530) (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 146.7.

It was during this time that Geoffrey Chaucer lived and broadened his knowledge. His grandfather, Robert Chaucer, had been collector of customs on wines from Acquitaine, having been a wine merchant with a sizeable fortune and some standing in the King's Court. Geoffrey's father, John Chaucer, had attended Edward III in Flanders in 1338, and in 1348 he was appointed to collect the custom on cloths in certain ports and also became deputy to the King's Butler in Southampton. Certainly, the family had made a humble beginning in public service to the king which Geoffrey Chaucer unhesitatingly continued.[2]

Chaucer's superior knowledge can no doubt be attributed to many facts. Not only had he been able to travel through England on pilgrimages such as that of the Canterbury Pilgrims in which he became acquainted with English people of many followings, but also during his period of government service, which began before 1366, he travelled back and forth to Europe as the King's envoy. This he did for nearly ten years during which time he became well-acquainted with foreign languages and traditions. He had also come in contact with what was probably the largest private library available at that time for in his description of the Clerk in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales he accounts for:

> Twenty bookes clad in blak or reed,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophie.[3]

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[2] F. N. Robinson (ed.), The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), pp. xxiii, xxiv.

[3] ibid., p. 20.

No doubt Chaucer had acquired knowledge out of every available source and it must be said that his own peculiar interest and native ability were modulated into his works, which are most important and representative of his time. These have exceeded the works of his contemporaries, some of which were: John Gower, William Langland, Ralph Strode and other of his native countrymen, not to mention John Barbour of Scotland, Leroy de la March of France, and others.

Through Chaucer's many contributions to English literature and poetry, many characters stand out. From the Canterbury Tales, which was probably among the last of his great works, we may choose a character whose identity and real position has long been poorly understood. Part of this misunderstanding is due to scholarly oversight and part to scholars' acceptance of the merit and work of another scholar who have taken his supposition as final authority, rather than tracing the meaning of the word to original sources. The fault is also due in part to an authority who was misled en route to an original source.[4] Hence, we find that the position of Chaucer's Franklin has in this century been a matter of dispute. It is my intention, in this thesis, to attempt to establish the true position of the Franklin; to show that in the fourteenth century he is proved by title and position to be a wealthy landowner of the gentry class.[5]

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[4]I have in reference the definition for franklin in the New English Dictionary, H. J. Todd's oversight in defining the word and Professor R. K. Root's acceptance of the definition as given by these references. I have dealt with all of these in a later paragraph.

[5]Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), p. 173.

We need to see the true picture of the fourteenth century Franklin. Scholars since the turn of the century, somehow or other, have not been able to identify the beginning, the classification, or the position of the Franklin. Apparently the word was referred to and used more in certain localities rather than throughout the whole English kingdom, but there is good evidence that kings and magistrates were familiar with the name because it is recorded many times upon government documents.[6] It is also recorded in other places of importance which I shall point out in affirming that the Franklins were a class of people in high social position in English history, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

It cannot be said that Franklins were a class of people that rose in any particular period of time and it is not exactly known how they obtained their position and wealth,[7] but it is known that they were existent as early as 1200 A. D. A record of this is found in the Rotuli Chartarum 43/1 in which is said,

> Unam carrucatam terrae apud
> Hamerwich cum villanis et franchelano,

and in line 82/1,

> Omnia feuda militum et franccolanorum
> Qui tenent de eodem monasterio.[8]

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[6]John Matthews Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1926), pp. 165, 66.

[7]Gordon Hall Gerould, Chaucerian Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 34.

[8]Henry Bradley, A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles Vol. IV. F and G. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 513.

There is early knowledge, then, of the Franklins. It is certain that the name denotes a title of a class of people who are freeholders of the landowning class.[9] This much is definite, but in its second definition it goes on to say that the Franklin was also one ranking next below the gentry.[10]

When defining gentry, the Oxford Universal English Dictionary on Historical Principles asserts the meaning to be:

> 1. Rank by birth (usu. high birth). b. The quality or rank of a gentleman (arch) 1447. c. Good breeding. 2. People of gentle birth and breeding; the class to which they belong; now specific the class immediately below the nobility 1585.[11]

Wordsworth says of it, "Grave gentry of estate and name."[12] It can be seen through this definition that the gentry were just below the nobility in rank and that they were people of high distinction on the English social scale.

Apparently these definitions have merit and are backed with factual evidence of some sort, but because I am in disagreement with the latter definition of franklin, that of, "ranking next below the gentry," I shall aspire to prove the statement to be false and further prove that the Franklin was of the gentry class.

In the first analysis, the Oxford English Dictionary was originally published as A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles. The

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[9] Onions, C. T. (ed.), Oxford Universal English Dictionary on Historical Principles Vol. IV. (Oxford: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1937), p. 747.

[10] ibid.

[11] Bradley, op. cit., p. 786.

[12] ibid.

idea originated in a resolution of the Philogical Society, and was passed on in 1857, at the suggestion of Archbishop Trench when he was Dean of Westminster. However, for several years the work was not undertaken. In 1879, the council for the Philological Society, due to the production of excellent specimens by the editor, James A. H. Murray, began the preparation of the dictionary.

The aim of the dictionary was to furnish an adequate account of the meaning, origin and history of English words now in general use, or known to have been in use at any time during the last seven-hundred years. This would include the words used even before 1200 A. D.

> It endeavors (1) to show, with regard to each individual word, when, how, in what shape, and with what signification, it became English; what development of form and meaning it has since received; which of its uses have, in the course of time, become obsolete, and which still survive; what new uses have since arisen, by what processes, and when: (2) to illustrate these facts by a series of quotations ranging from the first known occurance of the word to the latest, or down to the present day; the word being thus made to exhibit its own history and meaning: and (3) to treat the etymology of each word strictly on the basis of historical fact, and in accordance with the materials and results of modern Philological Science.[13]

The aim and purpose of the dictionary has now been established and we can understand the methods and intentions of recovering the meaning of words used in the last seven-hundred years. We can feel fairly certain that derivations are correct. However, it is my conviction that sufficient evidence was not given by the New English Dictionary to factually establish the Franklin as "ranking next below the gentry."

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[13] ibid.

I will present primary evidence to show that the Franklin belongs to the gentry class.

It must be remembered that the Oxford scholars did not begin to record these words and their meaning until the year 1879. Furthermore it must be pointed out that there was an event which took place long before the actual compilation of the dictionary that may have a definite bearing upon the dictionary's wrong definition of the Franklin.

In 1810, H. J. Todd quoted an elaborate note from Waterhous's Commentary on Sir John Fortescue's De Laudibus Legum Angliae, which only "tended" to show that franklins did not belong to the gentry.[14] Todd undoubtedly performed an injustice by not being able to reconcile this with the fact that Chaucer's Franklin was "at sessions,"[15] since by a statute of Edward III,[16] which he cited, justices were seigneurs, and that he was "ofte tyme knight of the shire,"[17] and since by another statute[18] members of parliament were "chevaliers et serjantz des mentz vaues du paies." From this evidence it is clearly seen that Todd was left in doubt as to the gentility of the Franklin. After a re-examination of Fortescue's remarks we realize that it is not he but his commentator who is responsible for lowering the status of Chaucer's sanguine country gentleman. If Todd would have studied the material

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[14]Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin." Publications of the Modern Language Association of America Vol. 41. (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1926), p. 262.

[15]Robinson, loc. cit.

[16]Gerould, loc. cit., 34 Edw. Cap. 1.

[17]Robinson, loc. cit.

[18]Gerould, loc. cit., 46 Edw. III.

more thoroughly, he would not have left his readers in doubt. This is a grave error that has led many Chaucerian scholars to conclude that franklins were of less importance than they really were.[19]

We cannot be sure that the late Henry Bradley consulted Todd before passing the definition of "franklin" in the New English Dictionary, but he may have been influenced by it. Certainly the example quotation, "ranking next below the gentry," is a disputable clause for the reason that nobody has ever ranked franklins among the nobility and therefore the clause is open to serious challenge.[20]

Gerould points out in his research that Professor R. K. Root accepted Bradley's definition without question and based it upon an interpretation of Chaucer's Franklin that was novel and ingenious rather than sound, which view apparently would mislead scholars seeking for truths concerning Franklins. Professor Root wrote:

> The Franklin has much in common with the better type of the "self-made man." He has at his disposal all that money can buy, and he has held office in his own country; but he is uncomfortably conscious of a certain lack of "gentility," -- betrayed by his fondness for the words "gentil" and "gentilesse," -- and of the full education which would adorn his prosperous estate. . . . Conscious that, with all that he has acquired and attained, he can never be quite the complete gentleman, he would fain be the father of a gentleman; but his hopes are disappointed by the unfortunate vulgar proclivities of his son and heir.[21]

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[19] ibid.

[20] ibid.

[21] ibid., p. 263; R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, 1906 (Rev. ed. 1922), pp. 271-2.

Perhaps if Professor Root had not known the clause for which Bradley stands responsible, "ranking next below the gentry," he would not have questioned the probability that Chaucer's Franklin was of the "gentil" class.

Although Professor Root's book was admirable, it tended to lead others astray, such as Todd and Bradley have done and apparently Kittredge, in another book on Chaucer's Poetry, accepts his view when he says, "The Franklin is a wealthy man, ambitious to found a family."[22] The statement is not elaborated upon or defended, which makes it a significant fact that in less than a decade, as it seems, a weak supported explanation had acquired fictitious value.

Gerould points out that Warton was right when he said that the Franklin was "a country gentleman," and further said that his "estate consisted in free land."[23] What is further known about the franklins is that they had a high position in society and therefore must be studied from the point where we find them.

The word franklin has been used in literature, as has been previously mentioned, from 1200 A. D. in the Rotuli Chartarum,[24] to at least 1843 A. D. where it is used in Lytton's Last Bar. IV. V, and it says,

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[22]George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 204.

[23]Gerould, op. cit., pp. 263, 4.

[24]Bradley, loc. cit.

His dress was that of a substantial franklin.[25]

In addition to these, there are many other writings between the dates mentioned which include the name franklin. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

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[25] Ibid.

II. HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO THE FRANKLIN

According to Muriel Bowden, much evidence has been amassed by Gerould to show that fourteenth century franklins were of the gentry, even though the original word for franklin meant simply "a freeman." Bowden says that Manly and Robinson are in agreement with Gerould because of the evidence he has found to substantiate the Franklin's position as being that of the gentry. I was unable to find primary evidence of it, but Manly tells us that Thomas Chaucer, Geoffrey's son, was a franklin in the fifteenth century, yet "he was one of the wealthiest and most powerful persons in England."[26]

Besides producing Gerould's evidence for the Franklin's position, I will also offer additional evidence which will help to substantiate the argument. Gerould leaves the dictionaries to find clearer evidence as to the meaning of the term "franklin."

The first observation that should be made is that in a few cases the word indicates a freeman as distinguished from a villain but does not here make any further suggestion of rank. In the year 1440 the word franklin, in the Promptuarium Parvulorum was termed"libertinus"[27] or libertine which, in its third definition, means "one free from self-restraint.[28] Nearly the same use of the word is found in the Vita

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[26]Bowden, op. cit., p. 179.

[27]Bradley, loc. cit.; Gerould, op. cit., p. 264.

[28]Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1951), p. 484.

Haroldi, written in 1300, where we find that the wounded king was carried off the battlefield, "a duobus ut fertur mediocribus viris quos francalanos sive agricolas vocant agnitus."[29] With the above evidence, there is little doubt that the authors regarded franklins as low creatures. Gerould says that Matzner in his Sprachproben and the editors of the New English Dictionary were probably justified upon the basis of these two instances in giving "freeman" as one meaning of "franklin," but that they would be unjustified in passing this off as the primary definition.[30]

I have found many other illustrations about the Franklin that refer to him as a member of the landholding class, and, when examined closely, to a class of very good social position. The context, at least, makes this so sufficiently clear in most instances that we can no longer doubt the fitness of calling the Franklin a gentleman. Gerould says that even in the thirteenth century the franklin was the equivalent of a country squire in modern England.[31]

Three of the earliest references to the word have been found in charters. The first of these is from the year 1166, during the reign of Henry II. In a grant to Cernal Abbey we find the words:

> Super dominium ecclesiae sunt feoda trium militum et dimidii cum tenura Francolensium in villa Cernae. Quisque autem

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[29] Bradley, loc. cit.; Gerould, loc. cit.; Ed. W. de G. Birch, 1885, p. 34.

[30] Gerould, op. cit., pp. 264, 5.

[31] ibid.

> istorum debet facere wardam ad praeceptum vestrum apud Castellum de Corfe uno mense per annum.[32]

It is not known how many franklins there were for their number is not mentioned, but they certainly must have been men of importance because it was their duty to guard Corfe Castle. Gerould says of them:

> Their wealth would depend upon their number, the aggregate of their holdings being to the amount of three and a half knights' fees, unless -- as is possible -- they had holdings from other overlords than the abbey.[33]

At any rate, these franklins must have been individuals who had possessions out of the ordinary and who were considered to be free men.

Two other references from pre-Chaucerian times are from Charter Rolls given to conventional establishments during the reign of John, already referred to in Chapter I of this thesis.[34] Gerould says of the first quotation, that the Franklin of this period could not have been a very wealthy person since his estate was only between 160 and 180 acres, but at the same time he could hire villains as laborers and could have done quite well. But in the second quotation, an interesting discovery is made when it is perceived that knights and franklins are mentioned in the same phrase as holding from the monastery, and apparently on the same terms. The only slight difference between them is one of titular rank, rather than of tenure. From this evidence it is seen that they occupy really the same positions.[35]

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[32]Gerould, op. cit., p. 265; Red Book of the Exchequer, ed. H. Hull, 1896 (Rolls Ser. 99), 1, 212. Quoted in De Cange from the Liber niger Scaecarii, concerning which see Hall's introduction.

[33]Gerould, loc. cit.

[34]See page four for quotations.

[35]Gerould, op. cit., p. 266.

During the thirteenth century, it is interesting to note that Le Fraunkeleyn was used as a surname, and for persons who had inheritances and holdings of land which shows that any people in this category had a very solid and brilliant social position.[36] Gerould states that this is some of the best evidence he has for establishing an assured position of the class.

At this point we will cite some references by versifiers who wrote at the end of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth. The first one that we will consider is the shadowy Robert of Gloucester, who in his account of King Lear warned parents against giving up their land to their children. Robert says:

> Vor wel may a simple frankelein . in miseise him so bringe.
> Of lute lond wanne ber biuel . such cas of an kinge.[37]

He is called "simple franklin," but in contrast to a king, it is as if one should set off a member of the squirearchy against the king.

Another writing, the Cursor Mundi, gives us an example in another way. The author tells about the conversation of Jacob with Pharaoh, who says of the magnificent Joseph:

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[36] ibid.; See, for example, the Calendar of Patent Rolls and Calendar of Close Rolls, as well as the Excerpta e Rotulis Finium in Turri Londinensi, ed. C. Roberts, 1836, which cover the years 1216-1272. The use of settled surnames for people above the lower classes is a phenomenon of earlier date than is sometimes supposed.

[37] Gerould, loc. cit.; Metrical Chronicle, ed. W. A. Wright, 1887 (Rolls Ser. 86), 1, 61, lines 821-822. Dated 1290-1300.; Bradley, loc. cit.

> First he was here als our thain
> But now es he for ai franckelain.[38]

While considering the honors held by Joseph at this time, it would seem that Pharaoh was meant to imply more by his antithesis than the mere contrast of freedom with serfdom. Gerould warns not to press this point too hard since here it is certain that the author needed a rhyme, but it must be remembered that the couplet could never have been written if early in the fourteenth century franklins were considered to belong to the lower orders.[39]

Nicholas Trivet evidently recognizes no wide gulf between a knight and a franklin either for he makes no test of it when in his Anglo-Norman Chroniques he writes that:

> Thomas Brotherton (filius R. Edouardi I) apres le mort son pere esposa la fille de un Fraunclein appelle Alice.[40]

It does not matter if historians affirm that the Earl of Norfolk's father-in-law was Sir Thomas Hales of Harwich, or that Trivet's statement is openly absurd in one particular, because Thomas of Brotherton was not born until 1300, and his father died in 1307. The point is that a contemporary chronicler could confuse a knight with a franklin after this manner and apparently no vast difference was recognized

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[38] Bradley, loc. cit.; Gerould, loc. cit.; Cursor Mundi, dated 1300-1325, ed. R. Morris, 1874-1893 (EETS), lines 5373-5374.

[39] Gerould, op. cit., p. 266,7.

[40] ibid., p. 267.

between the two.[41]

Robert Mannyng uses the word twice and even couples franklins with squires. This was an exact equation in the fifteenth century. Conan sends to Dianot for his daughter Ursula,

> And gentil damysels vngyuen,
> Bat able to mennes companye were bryuen, --
> Squyers doghtres, & frankelayns,
> To gyue hem to knyghtes & to swayns.[42]

The only difficulty here is to find the meaning that Mr. Mannyng can have attached to "swayns," but his second example is more revealing than the first. In regard to the Statute of Mortmain, in the second part of his Chronicle, he penned:

> Was mad an ober statut, bat non erle no baroun,
> No ober lord stoute, ne fraunkeleyn of toun,
> Tille holy kirke salle gyue tenenement, rent no lond.[43]

The corresponding lines in Pierre de Langtoft's Chronicle, which was Robert's source, run as follows:

> Est fet l'estatut, ke counte, ne baroun,
> Ne seygnur de terre, parmi la regioun,
> Face a seinte Eglise offrand ne doun
> De terre ne tenement, si par cunge noun
> Du rays e de son consayl.[44]

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[41] ibid.

[42] ibid.; The Story of England, ed. F. J. Furnwall, 1887 (Rolls Ser. 87), 1, 230, lines 6545-6548. Dated 1338.

[43] Gerould, loc. cit.; Ed. as by Pierre de Langtoft by T. Hearne, 1725, p. 239. This part of Robert's work is not in Furnivall's edition. It was based on Pierre de Langtoft, which explains Hearne's error of ascription.; Bradley, loc. cit.

[44] Gerould, loc. cit.; Ed. T. Wright. 1866-1868 (Rolls Ser. 47), II, 174.

Robert, no doubt, felt that "lorde stoute" was not a sufficient translation for "seygmur de terre" and so added "fraunkeleyn of toun."[45]

Certainly to show their high social position, J. Russell in his Book of Nurture, in line 1071, shows that:

> Marchaundes & Franklonz worshipfulle & honorable
> may be set semely at a squyers table.[46]

It must be said that squires, unquestionably, were country gentlemen and next to knights in rank. They were the landed proprietors and were often the principle landowners in a village or district.[47] It is no wonder that "Merchants and Franklins" were honored at the Squire's table, for they belonged to the gentry class too.

From the Roy Rede Me (arb.) of 1528, line 100 says:

> One or two ryche francklyngis
> Occupyinge a dozen mens lyvyngis.[48]

This writing shows that franklins were wealthy and held large estates which also produces evidence that they had possessions like others of the gentry class.

From 1590, Spenser's Fairy Queen says in line I. X. 6:

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[45]Gerould, loc. cit.; This phrase is illustrated by a writ analyzed in Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, ed. H. C. Maxwell Lyte, 1916, II, 56, No. 233. In this writ, dated 1 Sept. 9 Edward II (1315), Thomas de Polington is described as "lord of the whole town of Polington." "Town" was doubtless used in the sense familiar to all New Englanders.

[46]Bradley, loc. cit.

[47]Bradley, op. cit., p. 786.

[48]Bradley, op. cit., p. 543.

Entred in, a spatious court they see..
Where them does meete a francklin faire and free.[49]

Spenser here recognizes two qualities in the franklin to whom he refers, that of his striking appearance, he was evidently well dressed, which showed somewhat of his wealth, and he was a freeman. These are two good qualities of men belonging to the gentry class.

In Rushaws Historical Collection of 1659, it says in line I, 17:

Francklines, and rich Farmers, Esquires, to precede them, would yield your majesty also a great sum of money in present.[50]

The writer recognized the great wealth of these men and suggested to the king not to overlook the possibilities found within their means.

It is in Moufet and Bennett's Health Improv. (1655), published in 1746, that line 340 mentions:

The Franklin's Bread of England is counted most nourishing.[51]

The Franklin was not only free but through the years had actually improved upon his bread, making it most nourishing.

Another reference to franklins is made in 1659 by Howell in his Lexicon where he says, "Proverbs may be called the truest Franklins or Freeholders of a countrey."[52] This may be his way of saying that Franklins were some of the most intelligent people who lived in England. It is certain that they were independent and in my opinion their freedom caused them to be some of England's finest citizens and were able to make great contributions to the English economy.

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[49] ibid.

[50] ibid.

[51] ibid.

[52] ibid.

By 1577, Holingshed in his Chronicles hints at the lavishness of the Franklin's table when he says in line 31/1:

To purchase the name of a sumptuous frankelen or a good viander.[53]

Not only is there a hint at sumptuousness, but there is also a suggestion that people in the right position working upward on the English Social Scale could purchase or obtain a name of high rank.

In Somerville's Officious Messenger of 1727, he says of our subject in line 72:

No Franklin carving of a chine
at Christide, ever looked so fine.[54]

Again, this is another couplet that denotes the luxuries of the Franklin, of his table, his household and his dress.

The word franklin is used three times in William Langland's Piers Plowman, a writing contemporary to Chaucer's works. In the first example, the Dreamer, in the guise of an idle London priest, is conversing with Reason. In an obvious ironic strain he talks about the privileges and advantage of the clergy, the first among them being idleness. He goes on to say:

For shold no clerk be crouned . bote yf he ycome were
Of franklens and free men . and of folke yweddede.
Bondmen and bastardes . and beggers children,
Thuse by-longeth to labour . and lordes kyn to seruen
Bothe god and good men . as here degree asketh.[55]

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[53] ibid.

[54] ibid.

[55] William Langland, Piers Plowman and Richard the Redeless (Oxford: The University Press, 1954), p. 120.

There is a definite contrast here between bond and free, but the entire implication is that franklins are gentlefolk. In the second instance of Piers Plowman, although no satisfactory conclusions can be drawn according to Gerould, yet it should be noted that wit is discoursing about the contrariety of "Westminster Law," because it visits the sins of the fathers upon the children. If a householder perished on the gallows, though he were a franklin, his son lost the inheritance.[56] The passus says:

> For thauh the fader be a frankelayne . and for a felon be hanged,
> The heritage that the air should haue . ys at the kynges wille.[57]

The third case is even more conclusive as to the writer's estimate of the social position of franklins. Conscience is the speakers. He says that Jesus was knight, king, and conqueror because he had the virtue to make a conquest for the right. Langland says:

> To make lordes of laddes . of londe that he wynneth
> And fre men foule thralles . that folweth nouzt his lawes.
> The Iuwes, that were gentil-men . Iesu thei dispised,
> Bothe his lore and his lawe . now ar thei lowe cherlis.
> As wyde as the worlde is . wonyeth there none
> But vnder tribut and taillage . as tykes and cherles.
> And tho that become Crysten . by conseille of the baptiste,
> Aren frankeleynes, fre men . thorw fullyng that thei toke,
> And gentel-men with Iesu . for Iesus was yfulled,
> And vppon Caluarye on crosse . ycrouned kynge of Iewes.[58]

According to the B redactor of Piers Plowman, which was not disputed by the C redactor, franklins were not only freemen, but gentlemen as well.

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[56] D. Chadwick, Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), p. 45.

[57] Langland, op. cit., C, Pass. xi, 240-241, p. 279.

[58] ibid.; B. Pass. xix, 32-41. In C, Pass xxii, 32-41, pp. 552, 3.

This one passage alone would be sufficient evidence to refute the idea that they ranked "next below the gentry." The fine but very significant phrase "gentlemen with Iesu" is used to illustrate the meaning of "free-man" and there by the fallibility of systems to recover the original meaning of words is seen as it was used and placed in the New English Dictionary.[59]

Mr. Gerould points out that detailed and precise evidence of another kind has been found from the first half of the fifteenth century concerning the position of franklins. Oddly enough, it comes from a source, which according to him, "could not be bettered -- a book of etiquette." John Russell, who wrote the Book of Nurture, was compelled to put his mind on questions of precedence. He shows mens estates who were "equal with a knight," as sitting three or four to a mess at meal-time. He lists them as follows:

> Abbot and prior "sons mitre," dean, arch-deacon, Master of Rolls, under justices, barons of the king's Exchequer, provincial of a religious order, doctor of divinity, doctor of "both Laws," prothonotary, pope's collector, and mayor of the staple. At a squire's table, sitting four to a mess, come sergeants of law, late mayors of London, masters of chancery, all "prechers, residencers, and persons that ar greable," apprentices of law, merchants, and franklins.[60]

Gerould admits that this list may seem "slightly whimsical" but continues

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[59]Gerould, op. cit., p. 269.

[60]Ibid., pp. 269, 70.; The Babees Book, ed. F. J. Furnwall, 1868 (EETS 32), pp. 188, 89.

to give good argument in favor of Franklin's gentility saying that their position could have been defended by Joh Russell. Gerould further points out that merchants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had a higher social estate than they did in later times, but at this time they ranked with the gentry.[61]

I mentioned Sir John Fortescue's famous work De Laudibus Legum Anglial earlier and I would now like to take a quotation from it. When he composed this work between 1468 and 1471, he wrote:

> Regio eciam illa ita respersa refertaque est possessoribus terrarum et agrorum, quod in ea villula tom parva reperiri non poterit in qua non est miles, armiger, vel paterfamilias qualis ibidem frankeleyn vulgariter noncupatur. magnis ditatus possessionibus; necnon libere tenentes alii, et valetti plurimi suis patrimoniis sufficientes ad faciendum juratum in forma prenotata.[62]

This was translated in 1775 and reprinted in Amos' edition as follows:

> England is so thick spread and filled with rich and landed men, that there is scarce a small village in which you may not find a knight, and esquire, or some substantial householder, commonly called, a Frankleyne; all men of considerable estates: there are others who are called Freeholders, and many yeoman of estates sufficient to make a substantial Jury, within the description before observed.[63]

When Fortescue comments on the wealth of some of the "valetti," he clearly classifies franklins with knights and esquires rather than with the "libere tenentes alii."[64] Gerould concludes that Fortescue's

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[61] Gerould, op. cit., p. 270.

[62] ibid.; Cap. Ed. S. B. Chrimes, 1942, p. 68.

[63] Gerould, loc. cit.

[64] ibid.

inclinations are in agreement with those of John Russell, and from this point of view it may be determined that Franklins were of the gentry.

III. CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN

Now, we will get a closer look at Chaucer's Franklin. Chaucer gives us certain clues as to the Franklin's position in the Canterbury Tales. He was in the company of a "Sergeant of the Lawe." He was wealthy and lived generously on his land. He was "lord and sire" at "sessions," which means that he sat importantly as justice in petty sessions. He had been a sheriff. He had often been "Knight of the shire," representing his county in parliament. He had been a "contour," probably auditing the accounts of the sheriff. He was a "vavasour" and there had been none "worthier."[65] The Franklin calls himself a "burel man" and says that he never slept on Parnassus, learned Cicero, or acquainted himself with the colors of rhetoric,[66] which according to Gerould, are half-humorous deprecations of an individual who made no pretence of clerkly lore, though he showed sufficient learning in his tale.[67] It seems to me that each point mentioned here has significant value and when understood together gives adequate confirmation of the Franklin's position as a member of the gentry class.

The Franklin was going to Canterbury to visit the St. Thomas Shrine with a group of pilgrims. He was in the company of a Sergeant of the Law whose learning and success is equally emphasized with that

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[65] Robinson, loc. cit.

[66] ibid., p. 134, 5.

[67] Gerould, op. cit., p. 264.

of the Franklin. According to John Russell, the two men were of the same social rank and had associations in public and private business which, no doubt, let to their acquaintance and friendship. Gerould reminds us that the Man of Law had often sat as justice of assizes, "by patente, and by plein commissioun,"[68] where the Franklin would have been in attendence both as an important landholder and as a "countour," not to mention the litigation in which men of any substance seem almost continuously to have been engaged during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Chaucer does not use "countour" in the exact sense that John Selden does in his Titles of Honor, when he wrote: "For a countour was, if I am not deceived, a sergeant at law, known also then by both names."[69] It is certain that the Franklin, in understanding business, also had some knowledge of the law. From this point of view we can observe that "sergeant" was apparently used to designate propertied gentlemen who were not knights as well as lawyers. Edward III made a statute in 1372 which reads that neither men of law "pursuant busoignes en la Court le Roi," nor sheriffs during their terms of office, shall be returned to parliament as knights of shires. "Mes voit le Roi, que chivalers et serjantz des meuly vaues du paies soient retornez."[70]

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[68]Gerould, op. cit., p. 271.; The meaning of these terms is well illustrated by a reference to sheriffs in Statutes of the Realm, 28 Edw. III, cap. 9 (1354): "viscontes de diverses contees, par vertue des commissions et briefs generals."

[69]Gerould, loc. cit.; Works, 1726, III, 1027. Selden quotes the Mirror of Justices ("Chez le seigneur Coke en l'epist. du 9. livre"): "Countors sont serjeants, sachans la ley del royalm."

[70]Gerould, loc. cit.; Statutes of the Realm, 46 Edw. III (1372).

There is also a similar account recorded in Pierre de Langtoft's Chronicle. A detachment of men in a military expedition to Glascony are designated:

> Barouns e vavasours de gentil lynage,
> Chuvalers et serjauns of lur cosinage,
> Gens a pe sanz noumbre de more et boscage.[71]

Gerould points out that these sergeants may certainly be equated with franklins.[72]

Sir John Fortescue has reminded us, as was before mentioned, that Chaucer's Franklin was not exceptionally wealthy, and neither was he a poor man, but was like a great number of gentlemen who did not have titles but had great possessions. The idea that peers and knights were the only important landlords in the complex world of feudal tenure, is a serious mistake. From the Calendars of Inquisitions in behalf of the reigns of Edward III and Richard II, we are impressed by the sizeable holdings of men who were neither noblemen nor knights. Gerould reports that some of the wealthy commoners had land "scattered over several counties."[73] The Inquisitions confirm very conclusively the wealth and the importance of men below the estate of knights. Gerould reminds us

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[71]Gerould, op. cit., p. 272.; Langtoft's Chronicle, ed. T. Wright, 1866-1868 (Rolls Ser. 47). II, 230.

[72]Gerould, loc. cit.

[73]ibid.; See the case of John Giffard: VII, nos. 78, 180; IX, no 686. This same Giffard may possibly be referred to elsewhere without specific designation.

that Chaucer's Friar took advantage of this, who must have loved good cheer, and made himself beloved and familiar,

With frankeleyns over al in his contree,[74]

Chaucer, to further exemplify the Franklin's wealth, along with his hospitality, mentions that the food and drink in his house was immense.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the landed gentry were fairly prosperous and there is now no doubt of it, and, according to Thomas Fuller, the country gentleman has been well-to-do even into the nineteenth century. Fuller says:

> And here under favour I conceive, that if a strict inquiry should be made after the ancient gentry of England, most of them would be found amongst such middle-sized persons as are above two hundred, and beneath a thousand pounds of annual revenue. . . . Men of great estates, in national broils, have smarted deeply for their visible engagements, to the ruin of their families, whereof we have too many sad experiments, whilst such persons who are moderately mounted above the level of common people into a competency, above want and beneath envy, have, by God's blessing on their frugality, continued longest in their conditions, entertaining all alterations in the state with the less destructive change unto themselves.[75]

Men like these were often chosen to represent their counties in parliament. Chaucer's Franklin had been in parliament "ful ofte tyme." An examination of the lists of individuals summoned during the reigns of Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV shows that a knight of the shire was by no means always a knight in degree, even if it is true that he commonly held that rank. Men were selected from the counties by rank

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[74]Gerould, loc. cit.; Canterbury Tales, line 1,216.

[75]Gerould, op. cit., p. 273.; Worthies of England (1662), ed. P. A. Nuttall, 1840, 1, 63.

and estate and certain ones were more prone than others to select untitled men, but the honor was to a great extent reserved for knights. The Franklin had been in parliament many times and this evidence shows that he was a prominent leader in his shire. He could not have been elected if he had not been a gentleman because it was against the law to elect a commoner. It was also against the custom to send a lesser person to Westminster and this is affirmed in a statute of 1372, which, as I have already quoted, says, "Mes voit le Roi, que chivalers et serjantz des meuly vaues du paies soient retornez."[76] There is a more concise law in the fifteenth century that provides knights of shires,

> soient notablez Chivalers des mesmez Counteez pour lez queux ils serront issint esluz, ou autrement tielx notablez Esquires gentils homez del Nativite dez mesmez les Counteez comme soient ablez destre tiel Chivaler que en la degree de vadlet & desouth.[77]

Chaucer's Franklin had been a sheriff, and this further means that he was a man of high position in his county. Thomas Fuller says, "the principal gentry in every shire, of most ancient extractions and best estates, were deputed for that place.[78] Bowden records that the Franklin had been a sheriff and was "an administrative officer of the crown, ranking next in the shire to the Lord Lieutenant, and a pleader in court."[79] Trevelyan says of it, "This officer (a sheriff) was

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[76] Gerould, loc. cit.; Statutes of the Realm, 46 Edw. III.

[77] ibid., 23 Hen. VI, cap. 14.

[78] Gerould, op. cit., p. 274.; Ed. G. E. Woodbine, 1922; or T. Twiss, 1878 (Rolls Ser. 70).

[79] Bowden, loc. cit.

chosen by the crown from among the gentry of the district, and was the link between Westminster and the countryside."[80] He further says,

> He (the sheriff) had once carried on almost all the king's business in the shire, and though many of his powers had since been delegated to the Justices of the Peace or to the King's Judges on circuit, he still remained the most important local officer.[81]

It is certain that men of high position and of social rank (gentlemen) could only serve in the office of a sheriff. The man also had to have the ability to go along with the rank in order to succeed in his office.[82]

Sheriffs were selected with great care as Sir John Fortescue records. He declares that on the day after all Souls a large group of specified "high officers of the crown" meet in the Exchequer,

> Ubi hii omnes communi assensu nominant de quolibet comitatu tres milites vel armigeros, quos inter ceteros ejusdem comitatus ipsi opinantur melioris esse deposicionis et fame et ad officium vicecomitis illius melius dispositos, ex quibus rex unum tantum eligit.[83]

In the final explication of Chaucer's analysis of the Franklin's social position, he says that nowhere was there "such a worthy vavasour." To explain the meaning of vavasour, Gerould quotes from three of John Selden's observations. In the first observation,

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[80] George Macaulay Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), p. 57.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Gerould, loc. cit.

[83] Ibid.

> The use and continuance of the name of a vavasour was such, that from the Normans, until the time of Henry IV, it was a name known; but feudal only, not at all honorary.[84]

The second one says:

> And the Author of Fleta (lib. i, cap 5, S4): sub regibus sunt comites & barones, duces, milites, magnates, vavasores, & alii subditi ut liberi & servi, qui omnes aetatem xii annorum ad minus habentes ferre tenentur regi fidelitatis sacramentum.[85]

The third one explains,

> Nor for the nature of a vavasour; though we perhaps may soon miss in giving an exact definition of him, yet it is plain that he was ever beneath a baron. And it seems he was in the more ancient times only a tenant by knight's service, that either held of a mesne lord, and not immediately of the king, or at least of the king as of an honor or mannor, and not in chief, both of which excluded him from the dignity of a baron by tenure.[86]

Selden is just when he says of Chaucer's calling the Franklin a vavasour:

> It is likely that he gave him his title as the best, and above what he had before commended him for. Neither would he have put it as an addition of worth to a sheriff and a countour, unless it had been of special note and honor.[87]

Selden, in his conclusion, shows wisdom in assuming that "we perhaps may soon miss in giving an exact definition" of a vavasour.[88] Gerould says that modern historians have also been at a loss to define

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[84] *ibid.*, p. 275.

[85] *ibid.*

[86] *ibid.*

[87] *ibid.*

[88] *ibid.*

the term with precision. In behalf of this problem he quotes F. W. Maitland who says, "Whatever else we may think of these vavassores, they are not barons and probably they are not immediate tenents of the king."[89] He also quotes from Pallock and Maitland's History of English Law in which this unsatisfactory statement occurs: "Neither the theory that the vavassor must needs be a vassal's vassal, nor the derivation of his name from vassi vassorum can be regarded as certain. In England the word is rare."[90] Even though the word was rare, it was still recognized and used.

Henry de Bracton, whom we have mentioned earlier in reference to sheriffs, certainly was not in doubt as to the position of vavasours in the thirteenth century, even though his description of them leaves us still desiring a fuller meaning. He says:

> Item in temporalibus imperatores, reges, et principes in his quae pertinent ad regnum, et sub eis duces, comites et carones, magnates sive vavasores, et milites, et etiam liberi et villani, et diversae potestates sub rege constitutar. . . . Sunt et alii potentes sub rege, qui barones dicuntur, hoc est robur belli. Sunt etiam alii qui dicuntur vavasores, v ri magnar dignitatis. Vavasor enim nihil milius dici poterit quam vas sortitum and valetudinem. Sunt etiam sub rege militiam exercendam electi, et supradictis militent.[91]

Bracton lists vavasours after barons but before knights and implies that there is a kind of distinction as if barons and vavasours represented social grades, while knights were functionaries in war.

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[89] ibid.; Domesday Book and Beyond, 1897, p. 87.

[90] Gerould, loc. cit.

[91] Gerould, op. cit., p. 276.

A vavasour was evidently smaller than a baron but an individual of the same type. This is supported by Bracton's remarks when he is discussing rights of dower. He says:

> Sed quod dicitur de baronia non est observandum in vavassoria vel aliis minoribus foedis quam baronia, quia caput non habent sicut baronia.[92]

Knighthood was in another category. To Bracton the two positions were not equal and from the thirteenth century to the twentieth it would be impossible to establish the social value of each one. The important point here is on Bracton's evidence, that the vavasour was a land-holder of considerable importance. Bracton does not discuss the nature of his tenure, which may mean that the distinction between chief tenents and sub-tenants did not appear as important to the medieval lawyer as it does to the modern historian. Upon all occasions the vavasour was a magnate and person of dignity.[93]

Several writers other than Chaucer have also used the term. Pierre de Langtoft used the word at least three times in his Chronicle the first of which I have quoted on page twenty six. In this extraction it is clearly seen that barons and vavasours were from the "gentil lineage."[94] In the second quotation, barons and vavasours, as well as chivalers and squires are mentioned as being in the same category. In this instance,

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[92] ibid.

[93] ibid.

[94] ibid., p. 277.

a military force was again in question. King Edward sent to relieve Dunbar:

> Le counte Garenne, of tut son poer,
> Le counte de Warwyk, et Huge le Despenser;
> Barouns et vavassours, chuvaler, esquyer,
> Surays et Norays, i alaynt de bon quer.[95]

The third quotation is self-explanatory:

> A cele mesavenue estaient tuez
> Vavassours curtoys de gentil parentez.[96]

It is certain that de Langtoft held vavasours to be gentlemen. We must remember also that he died in 1307[97] and so expressed his views just previous to Chaucer's time, which would be from about 1340 to 1400.

A few decades later, Robert Mannyng of Brunne used the word in describing King Arthur's allocation of lands after his conquests on the European Continent. He said:

> He gaf also sire Beduer,
> Bot of fe his boteler,
> He gaf hym in fe all Normandie,
> Bitt benne hit was cald Neustrie,
> Boloyne he gaf to sire Holdyn,
> And Mayne to Borel his cosyn;
> He gaf giftes of honurs,
> & landes & rentes, to vauasours.[98]

This passage evidently has little to contribute, but it does not contradict Langtoft's usage of the word.

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[95] ibid.

[96] ibid.

[97] ibid.

[98] ibid.; The Story of England, ed. Furnivall, p. 384.

Gerould quotes a line from the English Sir Ferumbras, written in Chaucer's century, and seems upon first examination to be contradictory. It reads:

> Litel prowesse for me it were wiv a vauasour for to melle.[99]

This implies, at first glance, to mean a person of low estate but Ferumbras is talking foolishly, only momentarily, to the great Oliver. Gerould points out that Oliver is a braggert and he would have it understood that dukes and earls are the only proper antagonists for so great a warrior. Apparently there is nothing here to upset the belief that a vavasour was a person of high social rank.[100]

Camden, in the introduction to his Britain of 1617, gives an account of England's social orders. He says:

> Vavasores, sive Valvasores, proximum post Barones locum olim tenuerunt, quos a Valvis Iuridici deducunt. Franci, sum in Italia rerum potirentur, Valvasores illos dixerunt, qui a Duce, Marchione, Comite, aut Capitaneo plebem, plebisve partem acceperant. Rara haec fuit apud nos dignitas, & siqua fuit, jam paulatim desiit. Nobiles minores sunt Equites aurati, Armigeri, qui vulgo Generosi, et Gentlemen dicuntur.[101]

Certainly from this evidence there can be no doubt that "vavasour" in medieval English usage is in harmony with "franklin" and there is no distinguishment. Chaucer's Franklin was a vavasour and it is to be believed that all franklins were vavasours. The words appear to be

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[99] Gerould, op. cit., p. 278.

[100] ibid.

[101] ibid.

interchangeable and indicate a general social condition rather than titles. They are rare to appear in documents and Gerould feels the reason is that they were not very explicit and he goes on to say that anyone who could be called by these names held a very honorable status in the kingdom.[102] Gerould concludes by saying that "Chaucer's Franklin was a member of that class of landed gentry which was already old in the fourteenth century and which has never felt the lack of any higher title than gentleman, though from it have come, first and last, most of the men who have made England great."[103]

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[102] *ibid.*

[103] *ibid.*

CONCLUSION

From all of the evidence herein presented, we can conclude beyond any doubt that the Franklin, to whom Chaucer referred, was of the gentry class, possessed great wealth, and held an important position in society.

I have tried to show that it is easy for scholars to make mistakes if they rely too heavily upon dictionaries and other secondary source materials in their research. The possibility of finding new and different evidence from primary sources should never be overlooked. I have tried to present as much evidence as possible about the origin of the Franklin and have illustrated his position with a number of accounts to give sufficient evidence that he was a wealthy landowner of the gentry class.

There have been many historical references that have helped to establish the Franklin's identity and I am especially indebted to Gerould's findings for they have helped immeasurably to settle the argument as to whether the Franklin was of the gentry class.

Chaucer has not only shown his vast knowledge of the Franklin, but he has also given us one of the clearest pictures of a gentleman and his relationship to society in the fourteenth century. In the light of this investigation, it would be hard to find a better example of a true gentleman in all of literature.

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APPENDIX

Footnotes.

8 One Carrucatos near Hammerwich with serfs and franklins,

All fiefs (feudal holdings) of soldiers and franklins who hold them from the same monastery.

32 Above the domain of the church are the fiefs of three soldiers and half-holdings with tenure of franklins in the hamlet of Cerna. However, each of those must stand guard at your order around Corft Castle one month per year.

40 Thomas Brotherton (Son of R. Edward I) after the death of his father married the daughter of a Franklin named Alice.

42 And gentle damsels ungiven being able for men's company were brought squires daughters and Franklins to give them to knights and to swains.

43 An over statute (ruling) was passed that no earl or baron,
No overlord strong, nor franklin of town,
Shall rent any land, tille holy church shall give holding (approve the transaction).

44
The statute was made that no count, nor baron, nor holder f land, about that region should rent any offering or gift of land to holy church except by the sealed name of the King and his Council.

70 But let the King see, that knights and sergeants of middle class of the country be returned.

71 Barons & vavasours of gentil lineage,
Chevaliers (knights) and sergeants of their relation,
Peoples of the land without number from moor & thicket.

77 Let there be notable Knights from the same Counties for which they will be citizens, or else such noble squires, gentlemen by birth from the same Counties as may be able by power of right to be a Knight in the position of valet and servant.

83 When all these by common consent named from whatever county three soldiers or ambassadors, whom among the others of that same county they considered to be superior in fact and report, and better suited to the office of that viscount, from whom the king chooses only one.

85 Under Kings are counts and barons, dukes, soldiers, magnates, vassals, and other subordinates as freemen and serfs, who all having attained the age of twelve years at least are held to bear oath of fidelity to the King.

91 Likewise at times emperors, kings and princes in these areas which belong to the kingdom, and under these dukes, counts, and barons, magnates or vassals, and soldiers, and also freedmen and serfs, and various magistrates established under the king.... There are also other magistrates under the king who are called barons -- this is the strength of war. There are even others who are called vassals men of great dignity. For a vassal will be able to be said no better than a chosen vessel. There are also under the king soldiers, of course chosen to train the militia, and they carry on war, as said above.

92 But what is said about the barony is not to be observed in vassalage or in other lesser feudal holdings than the barony.

95 Count Garenne of all his peers,
Count of Warwich, and Hugh the Dispenser;
Barons & vassals, knight, squire
Southerners & Northerners, went there willingly.

96 At this encounter were killed courteous vassals of gentle parentage.

101 Vassals or Valvasores formerly held the position next after Barons, whom they led down from the Doors of the Judgement Hall. The Franks, when they took possession of affairs in Italy, called those men Vassals who had received from a duke, marquis, a Count, or a Captain a town or part of a town. This was a rare honor among us, and if any such existed, it has now vanished little by little. Lesser nobility are the Golden Knights (having gilded shields), Armorbearers, who are called gentlemen or in the common speech, Generosi.